



OIF TIPS – COPING WITH DEPLOYMENT SEPARATION



Separation from a loved one who is deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom can be an emotionally difficult time for all family members. The emotions can vary from low energy levels, feelings of sadness, anger, excitement, restlessness, tension, frustration, resentment, and depression. Additionally, there are many challenges for military families to overcome during deployments. It is important to recognize understand and face these challenges in order to effectively cope with the separation during deployment.

▪ Avoid the pitfalls that are often associated with deployments;

- Arguments prior to deployment are common. Generally, this is the result of distress due to upcoming separation. Realize this and try not to take them too seriously.
- Failure to discuss expectations sometimes can be a source of misperception, distortion, and hurt later on deployment. Resolving these issues such as disagreement around child rearing, financial management, or intimacy concerns from long distance will not be effective.
- Resolving marital issues that precede deployments is very difficult over long distance and is best left until the Soldier returns home.
- Understand that dates of departure and return often “slip” forwards and backwards.
- Avoid listening to or spreading rumors. It is best not to repeat the rumor. Because of rapid communication, rumors can spread unchecked causing great psychological harm to Soldiers and family members. For example, one Family Readiness Group (FRG) member passing on allegations of infidelity about another group member. Such rumors causes harm to Soldier, family members, FRG, and unit cohesion.
- It is important to accept change and growth by all family members. It is unrealistic to be reunited and expect everything to be the same as before the deployment.

▪ Some general tips to help the spouse/ family cope while the Soldier is deployed;

- If disagreements arise, leave the issue until you are face-to- face with your spouse.
- Establishing and maintaining a support network helps the family to cope.
- Include breaks in the daily routine. This may include weekly get-togethers with other family members and monthly outings for the children to a favorite park, restaurant, picnic, etc.
- The parent at home will need time away from the children. A regular “Mommy’s (Daddy’s)” day out is important to maintain sanity.
- Encourage all family members to share feelings, reassure your partner of your love and commitment, and try to see the deployment as a challenging opportunity for growth.
- Communication is important between the Soldier and family member. Use all available avenues of communication i.e. telephone calls, e-mails, letters, etc. It is important to keep in touch; however, try to end phone conversation and letters on a positive note.



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▪ **Some general tips for caregivers to help children cope while the Soldier (parent) is deployed:**

- Be honest with children about Daddy's or Mommy's deployment. Share information about the Soldier's work and what the parent is doing for our country. Answers questions openly and honestly, using words your children can understand.
- Give children a method of measuring the passage of time. Provide a calendar to help your child count the days the parent has been deployed.
- Make sure your spouse's parents are kept informed. The Soldier's parents share your concerns about the health and welfare of their deployed son or daughter. Grandparents and spouse can support each other during the deployment.
- Be responsible for continue providing a structure, stable and safe environment for your children. Children require reassurance that they are cared for and safe while the other parent is away.
- Make sure the deployed parent is part of everyday conversations.
- Help your children sort out what they hear and see in news reports. Find out what your children know and understand and talk with them about their feelings. Follow your child's lead. Give a small piece of information at a time and see how your child responds before deciding what to do next.
- Provide your children with a method to communicate to the deployed parent, i.e., letter writing or e-mail access.
- Try to maintain family routines and traditions during the other parent's absence.
- Keep children involved with outside activities and maintain constant communications with schools.

***Remain calm,
go slow,
stay informed,
and stay involved
to cope during these challenges.***

***An excellent source of help during this time is the unit's
Family Readiness Group.***

TC#06 March 2004



For more information access: www.armyonesource.com

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- Give children a method of measuring the passage of time. Provide a calendar to help your child count the days the parent has been deployed.
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